*175 to the southeast, were interested in the recovery of Turkestan. They had a purely defensive policy for the northwest land frontier. They fortified the passes in the Kansu Corridor and conciliated the Uighur inhabitants of Turkestan by granting them honors and privileges and not interfering with their governments.

The Ming court was more-concerned with the Mongols in the north. The strongest of these were the Oirats who at first submitted and then rebelled. The Yung-lo emperor personally led a series of expeditions into Mongolia and succeeded in holding them in check. But as the military strength of Ming China ebbed after his death, their power increased. In 1449, one of their chiefs, Esen, inflicted a disastrous defeat on the Ming forces and took the Ming emperor as prisoner. At the height of their power, the Oirats controlled an area as far west as the northern portion of Tienshan, as far south as Kansu and as far east as Chahar.

Throughout the Ming period, there were incessant encroachments by the Oirat, but the most serious were those led by Altan Khan in the 16th century. In his three major invasions of China, his horsemen despoiled the provinces of Shansi, Ninghsia and Kansu and extended the orbit of his power from Uriangghai in the north to Chinghai and Tibet in the south. He built a vast, though evanescent Mongol empire. Finally, in his old age he accepted a title from the Ming court and halted his raids on China.

Thus, for about eight hundred years from the latter part of the T'ang to the beginning of the Ch'ing, the extent of the Chinese empire did not go beyond the Kansu Corridor and the vast region of the Northwest was free of Chinese rule. During this long period, the Chinese were not only unable to recover Turkestan [169] but they were also uninterested in its recovery. The advance of the border peoples into China's North and Northwest pushed the Chinese to the South and Southeast. Gradually, with the rise of the southeastern coastlands as the cultural and economic centers of China and with the development of maritime travel, there was greater intercourse between China and the outside world by sea. The nation turned towards the Southeast to face the sea and the importance of the Kansu Corridor declined to that of the backdoor of China.

*175 Another reason for the reorientation was economic. Climatic
• 13 changes resulting in increased aridity led to the shrinkage of the
487 chain of oases that formed the caravan routes. This made travel difficult, and the desiccation of the soil reduced the fertility of the Wei River valley, once the home of Chinese civilization and
*175 the base for China's imperialist expansion. Natural calamities,
73 such as floods, droughts, pestilence, and famine, and the devas-
166 tation of wars added to the impoverishment of the area and quickened the shift of population centers from the Northwest to the
*175 Southeast. Sian (Ch'ang-an) the capital of China for two thousand
633

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GEOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND

I. The Physical Setting

A. Location and Importance.

13 Lanchou, the capital of Kansu, is the geographic center of China. If one draws a horizontal line from west to east and a vertical line from south to north, he finds that the northwest quarter of China just covers the whole area of Sinkiang, Kansu, and Chinghai or Koko Nor. Owing to scanty rainfall, a great part of the area is a vast desert, dotted with oases and strips of cultivation. It is generally classified as the interior continental desert and steppe region of China.

771 184 From the viewpoint of geographic location, Northwest China, especially Kansu Province, is a transitional zone of cultural variations. Religions, for example, are different. From Kansu northwestward to Sinkiang, the majority of the inhabitants are Mohammedans. Contrarily, southeastward to China proper, there is more Buddhism and Christianity.

241 233 182 Again, Kansu furnishes a natural boundary for economies. From the eastern end of Kansu southeastward the area is mainly agricultural, while the area northwest from Kansu is largely a pastoral region. People there are adapted to a nomadic life with a relatively self-sufficient economy. As a result, the trading activity is small. It is limited to a small village or an isolated oasis.

131 The area is adjacent to the Mongolian People's Republic on the north and northwest and the Tibetan Plateau on the southwest. Moreover, it lies in the path of direct communication with Soviet Russia through the narrow plain of the Kansu Corridor by way of Sinkiang in the extreme northwest. It is an important part of China as a strategic pivot linking Asia and Europe and it is the great joint between Inner Asia and the Pacific coast.

B. Surface Features.

133 The physical features of northwest China generally may be classified as plateaus. However, viewed in terms of the present relief of Kansu, the high lands are all located along the southern border of the province. They are generally called the Ch'i-lien-shan, the Nan-shan, or the Southern Mountains. This mountain range forms the natural boundary between Kansu to the north and Chinghai to the south. There are a few passes situated in this mountain range with an average height of 12,900 feet. The length of the Chi-lien-shan is roughly estimated at 570 miles. Its east end is dissected by the streams of the upper Yellow River into a few isolated

313 mostly in Kansu. In 1945, large-scale afforestation projects were
[185] undertaken by the provincial government, especially in Ninghsia. The exceptional fact about these projects was that the young seedlings were properly cared for and did not die as so frequently occurred in other afforestation schemes. The Ninghsia projects were, of course, taken over by the Chinese Communists.

311 In the loess plateau region, between the great wall and the
139 mountains, and between the Tibetan Highlands on the West and
313 the Yellow plain to the East, there is almost no forest cover. Forests are found only in the more inaccessible areas or in temple groves. Their disappearance is related partly to needs for lumber but also to the introduction of new crops, such as corn and Irish potatoes, which will grow on the upper slopes. Many hills
[241] were burned over in order to clear the land for a cultivation
[134] which could last for only a few years until erosion swept away the last trace of soil.

5. The border region

*175 In 1937, the Chinese Communists occupied the northern portion
*668 of Shensi as well as the fringe areas of Chinghai, Kansu, and
433 Ninghsia. This region was regarded as the Shensi, Kansu, Ninghsia, Chinghai border region and was developed by the Communists
[437] into a relatively self-sufficient area. When they were able, they exchanged surpluses such as oil, salt, herbs, skin and wool for articles which they could not as yet produce in sufficient quantity.

*175 The Communists carried out land reform as soon as they were
*668 fully entrenched in power. Large land holdings were cut up and
[423] parcelled out to peasants with little or no land. Rents and interest rates were reduced, efforts were made to extend cultivation, increase the number of draft animals, and develop labor cooperation beyond family circles.

*175 In a study by Yung-ying Hsü, issued by the Institute of Pacific
*668 Relations, there is a summary of the economy and military status
433 of this region. There are numerous statistics to indicate increases in production of certain crops. These are the only available statistics we have for the region during this period, and the figures seem to indicate that despite the excessive expenditures for the maintenance of an army and guerilla forces as well as a governing body and administration, progress was made in raising the level of agriculture. However, by 1943, trade figures for the region indicate an imbalance of payments and a drain of currency from the region indicating that increasing military commitments were absorbing the created wealth of the region.

• 13 D. Conclusion

241 We may sum up the obstacles to agricultural development as
311 follows: geographic and climatic problems are the most serious. The amount of cultivable land that can be reclaimed and used for

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13 241 311 farming purposes is not great. Deserts, high mountains, and loess covered plateaux limit the expansion of further cultivation. The margin of cultivation can be extended but not without the great cost involved in reclaiming land and constructing irrigation networks. The dearth of rainfall in many sections of the Northwest and the shortness of the growing season also handicap farming. The destruction of wooded areas and gradual ruination of the top soil in the past has resulted in severe erosion and the elimination of important organic substances necessary for soil fertility.

241 433 489 [438] The absence of transport and communications has encouraged greater subsistence farming and less production for markets. The inability of the farmer to sell his surplus and obtain a profitable return so that he could increase production or practice more diversified farming, has stunted the growth of internal markets in the Northwest region. The inability of the Nationalist Government to link the internal markets of the Northwest to China Proper by a series of transport and communication systems, and provide for a free flow of capital, as well as short term low interest rate loans, has seriously retarded the development of agriculture.

241 311 [435] [433] We have seen from our data that while the above problems are quite serious, there exists no real problem of tenantry or population pressure on the land. Furthermore, given high prices for their goods, as occurred during the second world war, the farmers of the Northwest, in some instances, could by more intensive farming methods raise the level of output significantly.

241 311 433 Both T. H. Shen and J. L. Buck (agronomists) feel that if there were some restoration of fertility to the land in terms of resodding and planting root crops, and if a large portion of the hilly sections could be turned over to the raising of livestock, certain sections of the Northwest would come to have a distinct comparative advantage economically so far as the production of livestock is concerned, and greater incomes would be forthcoming to the rural inhabitants (this assumes such products could be cheaply exported and necessitates a proper balance between farming and livestock raising).

241 433 One of the most vital factors not yet mentioned, is the necessity for constructing irrigation works and to further extend those already in existence. This entails also the building of large reservoirs; the small magnitude of irrigation works is one of the greatest stumbling blocks to the development of areas like Sinkiang and Kansu, since most of the land there is desert.

However, to carry out the above projects which would overcome some of the obstacles to the expansion of agricultural production, it would be necessary that large capital outlays be available. Serious consideration of greatly expanding the area under cultivation might, however, lead to higher costs than any administration could bear, and in turn result in diminishing returns.